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William Loos, MD  
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313 N. Figueroa Street, Suite 912  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Tel: (213) 240-8101  
Fax: (213) 481-0503

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February 28, 2006

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Bruce A. Chernof, M.D.  
Acting Director and Chief Medical Officer

SUBJECT: **HOMELESS PATIENT DISCHARGES**

This is a follow-up to our January 30, 2006 memo to your Board, regarding Homeless Patient Discharges, in which the Department responded to your November 29, 2005 Board approved motion by Supervisor Antonovich, instructing the Department to: 1) Work in collaboration with the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS), the Department of Mental Health (DMH), and the Sheriff's Department to report back with recommendations on protocols related to discharges of homeless patients; 2) Work with the CAO and DPSS to report back on the feasibility to pilot on-site DPSS caseworkers to address the needs of homeless individuals at County Hospitals; and 3) Report back on the status of the Department's Homeless Services Action Plan.

In that memo, the Department committed to: 1) Provide a report to your Board on the results of the survey that assessed the feasibility of stationing DPSS eligibility workers on-site at DHS Hospitals and the steps identified to implement this service, 2) Provide a summary of the four general acute care hospitals discharge policies and any enhancements to be made to those policies, 3) Provide the contact information of the staff at each of these DHS Hospitals, who are ultimately responsible for the discharging of patients and describe any investigations related to allegations that a DHS Hospital inappropriately discharged a homeless individual.

**Feasibility of Stationing DPSS Eligibility Workers at DHS Medical Centers**

In an effort to assess the feasibility of having DPSS eligibility workers stationed at DHS Hospitals to take General Relief, CalWORKs, and Food Stamp applications, DHS conducted a survey from December 15, 2005 through January 15, 2006 at each of the four DHS general acute hospitals to identify the number of homeless patients who may be eligible for DPSS benefits. During this 30-day period, the social work staff identified a total of 383 patients who were homeless; 170 who do not receive but may be eligible for General Relief; and 7 who do not receive but may be eligible for CalWORKs. Based upon these results, DPSS will be developing and presenting to your Board a staffing plan and budget on April 4, 2006. If approved by your Board, DPSS and DHS will develop an implementation plan for a pilot program with a July 1, 2006 start date.

**Policies for Patient Discharges**

All of the DHS Hospitals have policies for discharging of patients; however, only one of the facilities has a policy specific to the discharging of homeless patients. DHS plans to utilize the Clinical Standards and Implementation Guidelines for the Discharging of LA County Department's Homeless or Unstably Housed Consumers that were drafted by the discharge work group convened by the Service Integration Branch (SIB), to develop and implement a standardized policy within all of our inpatient facilities that will outline

the expected discharge planning activities to be conducted on behalf of our homeless or unstably housed patients. The Department anticipates these new policies being fully implemented by July 1, 2006.

**Discharge Planning Contacts for DHS Hospitals**

Patient discharges involve the physician in charge of the patient's care; and the assigned nursing staff, utilization review nurse, and social worker. However, the social work departments are the contacts for any discharge-related concerns. The Social Work Directors for each of the DHS Hospitals are as follows:

LAC+USC Medical Center – James Piazzola, (323)226-5253  
Harbor UCLA Medical Center – Larry Schneider, (310)222-4225  
Martin Luther King Jr./Drew Medical Center – Stephanie Beacham, (310)668-3865  
Olive View Medical Center – Jean Scott, (818)364-4297  
Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center – Greg Thompson, (562)401-7867

To date, we are unaware of any specific report to DHS alleging an inappropriate discharge of a homeless individual from any of the DHS Hospitals. Should we receive a report of such an incidence, DHS's Homeless Coordinator will investigate immediately and intervene as necessary.

If you have any questions or need further information, please let me know.

BAC:lb  
511:020

c: Chief Administrative Officer  
County Counsel  
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors  
Sheriff  
Director of Public Social Services  
Director of Mental Health  
Director of Children and Family Services  
Director of Community and Senior Services